

VZCZCXRO9749
RR RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHRY #1824/01 3540952
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 200952Z DEC 06
FM AMEMBASSY CONAKRY
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0367
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 001824

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

FOR AF/W, AF/EX, DS/IP/AF, CA/OCS

E.O. 12598: N/A

TAGS: [PARM](#) [CWC](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [OPCW](#) [CBW](#) [GV](#)

SUBJECT: GUINEA'S UNIONS PUT STRIKE ON HOLD, FOR NOW

REFS: A) Conakry 1798 and previous

B) Conakry 1818

1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Guinea's CNTG-USTG union coalition has decided that it will not call a general strike during December. Ongoing negotiations have resulted in government concessions on retirement-related issues. With the upcoming end-of-year celebrations, union leadership believes that the costs of a general strike would far outweigh any likely benefits. They have postponed any organized labor action until January. Union leaders acknowledge they have little control over teachers and other groups who might decide to launch wildcat activities. Guinea's citizens are looking to the unions to force the government to address the deepening economic crisis. However, the union platform is limited in scope and their capacity to force wide-ranging change may disappoint a population with few avenues for repair. End Summary.

Negotiations Bear Fruit on Retirement Issue

2. (SBU) Guinea's preparations for a general strike (Ref A), are currently on hold. As a result of ongoing negotiations, the government and Guinea's CNTG-USTG union coalition have reached a limited agreement on the retirement issue, thus addressing the most immediate demand. In a December 18 meeting, Minister of State for Internal Affairs Moussa Solano and Minister of Labor Pierette Tolno reportedly announced that the government would cancel all retirements for 2006 -- reversing its decision to retire thousands of workers who had reached the legal retirement age. The unions had vehemently protested this action as a violation of the terms of agreement signed earlier in 2006. The ministers also reportedly announced that in April 2007, the government would introduce a law in the National Assembly to raise the legal retirement age.

3. (SBU) While retirement is only one item on a long list of demands, it was enough to calm the unions in the near-term. Union leaders confirmed to us during a December 18 meeting with the Charge that they have no new demands on the table -- negotiations are only to force the government to apply and adhere to the agreements signed in the aftermath of the first two strikes in March and June. The organizers recognized that the union coalition has achieved major concessions over the course of the year. However, most of these achievements, they said, are being nullified by runaway inflation and dramatic decreases in purchasing power. The leaders lamented that even if the government upholds all its promises, the situation of the average worker would not be much improved.

Union Action Will Be Delayed Until January

4. (SBU) Union leaders expressed to us their reticence to strike in December, disrupting national life during "a holy month for all Guineans." Both Eid al-Adha (Tabaski) and the New Year fall on the

last weekend of December this year. Union leaders recognize also that Christmas is a concern for the minority of Guineans who are Christian. They said that if they were to call a strike, no transportation would be available to serve most Guineans who typically return to their home villages during the month. They also said that with the pilgrimage to Mecca ongoing, a strike would destroy the ability for citizens to put together necessary resources to fund these journeys. Since most Guinea's live hand-to-mouth, the leaders said, a strike at this moment would cause major social and economic disruptions that they did not believe the population could withstand. The union organizers also acknowledged that at present, it would be difficult to mobilize its members and sympathizers to follow a general strike.

15. (SBU) The inter-union coalition continues to hold ongoing meetings among its members. A December 20 meeting is scheduled where leaders are reportedly planning to discuss the decision to delay any strike until January. Yamoussa Toure, Deputy General Secretary of CNTG, told us that in January, they would once again

SIPDIS
put the strike back on the table. They would also raise new demands, based on the current context. Over the next few weeks, however, they will continue to meet with the government to see what can be done to address its other "transgressions" of the agreed terms, Toure said.

How Will the Base Respond?

16. (SBU) With divisions within the union rank and file, the decision to delay the strike will undoubtedly be met with mixed reaction. In our December 18 meeting with union leaders, they told us that teachers have yet to be paid and that while signed by Conte, the document that addresses their special status has yet to be

CONAKRY 00001824 002 OF 002

implemented. Protests and small wildcat strikes by contract teachers have periodically arisen in different regions over the last few months. More recent spontaneous protests by students have also taken place in Conakry (Ref B). These activities have not been coordinated through the inter-union coalition.

17. (SBU) The union leaders noted the difficulty of reaching their members in all regions of the country. Communication is especially difficult with adherents in N'Zerekore as well as in rural and outlying areas, they said. Sarah Rabiattou Diallo, President of CNTG, stated the unions would act only when ready -- that they wanted to make sure all of Guinea's workers received the necessary information, including the signal to strike. Unfortunately, they said that meager resources make outreach a continual challenge.

18. (SBU) On a recent trip to Labe, Poloff met with union leaders who severed ties to this headquarters after Conakry-based negotiators suspended the June general strike. The regional leaders said that while relations have been re-established, there is a deep degree of mistrust and the lack of communication with headquarters. This exacerbates frustration in Labe and in other regional centers, making them more likely to act in their own best interests, they said. In response to a question about an upcoming general strike, the local union leaders told us this time, "They would go to the limits in order to force changes to guarantee improvements in the lives of workers in the formal and informal sectors." They expressed doubts that leaders in Conakry are prepared to make the same sacrifices. In our December 18 meeting with CNTG leaders, Poloff urged that communication and transparency were key to ensuring cohesion.

Comment

19. (SBU) The union's decision to delay a general strike seems to be based primarily on timing. They want to be sure that their actions will have the greatest effect and cannot guarantee success during

the month of December. The unions also may be less able to control any generalized action. At the same time, the unions acknowledge their limitations -- demands are limited to the list of items negotiated earlier in the year. The union leaders expressed frustration at Conte's liberation of Mamadou Sylla and Fode Soumah (Ref B), stating that it was clear that Guinea is being governed with impunity and fundamental disregard for the rule of law. While they consider their negotiated agreements as "law", they said they have no confidence that these or any government promises would be upheld. End Comment.

WINN